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## SINGER VEHICLE DESIGN ROB DICKINSON

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CANADA'S NEWEST RACE TRACK

### ALEX INNES

HEAD OF COACHBUILD DESIGN  
AT ROLLS-ROYCE

### TARGA LAMBORGHINI

AUTOMOTIVE PILGRIMAGE UP  
THE CALIFORNIA COAST



DISPLAY THROUGH MAY 31, 2019



# ROB DICKINSON

SINGER VEHICLE DESIGN - EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT

STORY BY STEVEN KITTRELL

PHOTOS BY DREW PHILLIPS, ALEX TAPLEY & SINGER VEHICLE DESIGN

Over the last several years, I've crossed paths with Singer Vehicle Design, much like most of you have – at events like The Quail Motorsports Gathering, the Goodwood Festival of Speed or even at the Rennsport Reunion this past September. Luckily for me, I've had quite a few personal and private encounters with the visionary craftsmen which has allowed me to gain more intel and insight over the years on how this Southern California-based boutique restoration and design shop functions. Private events, personal drives, client interviews and workshop tours have aided me to grasp with more certainty what makes this company click and grow to a level of superstardom, rarely ever seen today in our collector car community.

One significant element, however, has alluded me to some degree – one that holds most of the weight in the company's success – and that's just what makes founder and creative director Rob Dickinson tick. The former Catherine Wheel alternative rock band singer and consummate artist is never short of words, but really getting to the core of the man can somewhat get lost in the translation. An intimate phone call at the





very start of the New Year opened some doors and my eyes to just what keeps the driving force inspired, taking it to eleven and what "Everything is Important" means to him today.

It was very clear early on in our conversation what mattered the most to Rob at that exact moment. The boisterous front man of Singer Vehicle Design hesitated none to start delving into the internal focus of the brand and where most of his chips were being pushed. The Dynamics and Lightweighting Study – or DLS for short – which was unveiled at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2018, were nearly the first words out of his mouth after very quick pleasantries. A bold undertaking to say the least, the DLS cars are a collaboration with multiple technical partners - such as Williams Advanced Engineering - but more importantly, with the client in mind to create the most advanced air-cooled Porsche 911, ever.

"Three years of development to get us to the DLS. A fantastic collaboration

with many of the top industry leaders in technology and motorsports, and here we have them at our fingertips," spoke Rob in a voice anxious to be heard, but careful in what he wishes to say. "Singer isn't just a one-idea company. We have finally found the space to flex our muscles in areas I've always wanted to, and the DLS is the first fruits of that. No matter what the project is, it's going into a direction of design. I've always wanted and considered ourselves as a design company."

He wasn't kidding as Rob and company have corralled some of the industry's top notch players to join forces on this vision. As mentioned, the major partner in all of this is Williams Advanced Engineering who's presently accountable for the suspension, engine advancements and overall aerodynamics. But the 'Ultimate 911' needs even more help than that, so they aligned with Brembo & BBS, Momo & Michelin, Recaro & Bosch, just to name a few. With only 75 restorations slotted at a price point around \$1.8M, the newest addition in the Singer lineup is

expected to start gracing client's garages in the Fall of 2019 and promises to be a technical wonder.

Speaking of specs, the DLS sports an aggressive 4.0-liter naturally aspirated, air cooled flat six Williams motor, with a recorded 500 horsepower at an astounding 9,000 RPM. Let's not have oversight on the lightweight throttle bodies with dual overhead cams, four valves per cylinder and a very unique oil lubrication system. All with direct input from Porsche's most celebrated engine designer, Hans Mezger and legendary former Porsche engineer Norbert Singer. Standard equipped Hewland 6-speed manual transmission, ABS & traction control systems developed by Bosch and Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires – all custom sized and fitted by Michelin.

What else? Of course, the emphasis is the car being lightweight, so the entire exoskeleton is carbon fiber, including the iconic rear ducktail spoiler which produces calculated downforce, amplified by the

front splitter and rear diffuser. Lastly, the interior is dripping with exposed carbon and calculated frills that match ingenuity. Rob gets just as excited as the rest of us talking about it.

"What if there wasn't a cap on the development budget? How great can the classic 911 be? Those questions were inspired by our clients and our vision and our ambitions are inspired by them as well. We thrive and accept the mantle of responsibility toward the expectations out of Singer, and that derives from the demand to just be better."

Origins of the DLS naturally comes from too many pints in a pub – like all brilliant ideas. A dream-turned-reality driven from the consummate relationship between company and client. We all see from the outside the cult-like following around the internet. You can't go a day on social media or flipping through your favorite print publications without eye-popping commission pictures or a constant reminder of the reimaged. No, most of





PHOTO BY ANGELA WEAVER



the population will never own these masterpieces, but the ones who do feel a very strong kinship with the company, and one another. Rob states to me that this is by design, as the Singer staff work tirelessly to cater to all clientele and offer a unique ownership experience.

"When we put our clients together, I want to get the experience right, as I feel like it's a creative endeavor as well. Anything that Singer touches must hit the right button of acceptability and in a way that our clients appreciate. That sense that there is that common bond knowing that we are going the extra mile for them; it's really a powerful thing."

All these reimagined and designed products come back to the sum of the particles – the workshop and assembly areas. As mentioned, I've been able to witness many stages of the Singer evolution and appreciate it more than most as a past operations manager of two classic car service and restoration shops. Craftsmanship and ingenuity come from workspace flow and continuity. In order to achieve this, there must be an embryonic structure, says Rob, and after 10 years



and over 100 completed and delivered commissions, Singer continues to reinvent their process and the way the work flows on a daily basis.

"Our goal this year is to ramp up delivered cars. Attacked the engineering on the classic quite intently with a view to improve the quality of the restorations even further. Our engineers push me and our space to improve, to ask ourselves the hard questions and to make sure we can live up to the demand, frankly."

History has shown us countless extraordinary concept cars that cheapened throughout the development and into the final result – lacking the root of what made it special in the first place. With Rob's creative direction, Singer has seemingly done the exact opposite, making the cars more specialized, powerful and beyond what initial sketches would suggest. This is an infamous trait

of theirs to make it lighter, faster and more visually appealing as the project moves along.

Rob is notorious for inking the blueprint only to come back to the draft board and marking it all up again. How can we make it lighter? Is the car set up for low RPMs just as well as at redline? What do we need to address again before interior goes to the trimmers? These are all common comments from Rob, which goes back to the night he infamously spraypainted on the wall of the foremost workshop 'Everything is Important.'

"We've accepted the fact that what we do is intently artisanal, but we understand that we have to continue to improve on the cars and the engineering. That is our continued voyage, and we hope that is going to bear fruit in our ability to meet the rising demand and originality."

I'll admit that before this interview I had perceived Singer and Rob as being in a state of finesse. Meaning, the vision is tried, tested and true and now it was about just indulging in the details. According to Rob, I couldn't have been more off. Yes, they pride themselves as a 'Celebration of Heritage' and the 100th commission was a proud achievement – but this did not tolerate much time to reflect or sit on the accomplishments. It only meant there was more work to do, and many more risks to take.

"We are launching a very new idea this year as well that's going to surprise a lot of people," Rob says with a laughing chuckle on the other end of the line. "Of course, I can't quite tell you what that is yet...but it's going to be phenomenal. It's a busy year for us, and we're just getting on with the program, if you like."